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DISCOURSE

ON THE

True Nature of the Christian Religion.

AS IT STANDS SUPPORTED ON

SCRIPTURE AUTHORITY,

IN OPPOSITION TO

THE DOCTRINES OF

ARIANS AND METHODISTS.

L O N D O N :

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE design of this little Piece is to bring the Reader to an impartial consideration of what the Christian Religion truly is, that upon comparing his own principles and practice with those plain texts of Scripture which are here laid before him, in the native force of their own simplicity, he may form a right judgment of himself, whether he is a real or only a nominal Christian.

In vain we make objections to the obscurity of Scripture, when these few passages of it teach us, in such plain terms, what is a true Faith, and what are the genuine fruits of it. Were there nothing more in the whole Bible within the reach of our understandings (which is very far from being the case) these alone would be sufficient to point out the way to heaven, so that none could mistake it but by their own carelessness or perverseness.

How then it comes to pass that the principles and actions of the generality of mankind are so directly contrary to the religion they profess, they themselves must be left to account for; but that they are so, is a melancholy truth, which needs no other proof than to look into the
world,

world, and compare the maxims and customs of it with the revealed will of God. Whatever therefore be the cause of this fatal delusion, the only way to the cure of it must be to try ourselves by this standard of unerring truth, God's holy word; and so far as it is our constant endeavour to be guided by the rules of that word, so far, and no farther, may we be assured that all its promises do belong to us.

If then we would obtain true liberty in this world, and everlasting felicity in the world to come, let us hold fast the faith, and live as it becomes the gospel of Christ; for this is the highest degree of that liberty with which Christ has made us free, that not all the allurements or threatenings of the world, no not even the fear of death itself, shall be able to prevail with us to break the least of his commandments: And the nearer we advance to this glorious liberty, the more abundantly we shall find the happy consequences of it, the cheering communications of God's favour in this world, and the bright assured hope of everlasting glory, and unspeakable happiness in the world to come; so that we shall from heart-felt conviction say with David,

Thy word is tried to the uttermost, and thy Servant loveth it.

JOHN

JOHN xv. 4.

Abide in me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

LUKE vi. 43, &c.

A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit; for every tree is known by his own fruits; for of thorns men do not gather figs; neither of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? whosoever therefore cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doth them, I will shew you to whom he is like; he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock: but he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth, against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

THERE is such a variety of doctrines and even confusion of opinions come abroad into the world, that the very notion of true religion seems in danger of being lost by those who are continually tossing about from one teacher to another: I shall therefore endeavour here to bring to view a complete unerring rule, both of faith and practice, which I shall do by transcribing the Scriptures themselves, I mean those clear and striking passages of them, which cannot easily be misunderstood by any reader who duly attends to them; I say, not *easily* misunderstood.

stood by any. But in order to have them rightly impressed upon our hearts, so that we may bring forth fruit unto holiness, it is most undoubtedly and absolutely necessary, that we earnestly implore the light and grace of God's holy spirit to direct and prosper us in this our search after eternal life; and if we do thus ask, we shall receive, if we do thus seek, we shall find, as our Saviour has promised us; which promise at the same time warns us, that unless we do seek, we shall not find, unless we do ask, we shall not receive.

I shall begin with the testimony which St. John gives us in the first chapter of his gospel of the divinity of our Saviour, a truth which has been unhappily disputed by those who call themselves Christians, and pretend to believe the written word of God, and allow this gospel of St. John to be a part of it. But with what a studious and laborious perverseness must they go about to take away the plain sense and easy meaning of these words? 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God; all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made: in him was life, and the life was the light of men; and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.' That St. John speaks these words of our Saviour Jesus Christ is undeniably clear from the following verses:

'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John; the same came for a witness, to bear witness of that light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light that was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not: but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' We have here a full declaration both of the Godhead and Manhood of our Saviour;

Saviour; such a one as leaves no room for doubtful interpretations, nor is capable of being taken in any other sense than in that which establishes him to be very God of very God, by any unprejudiced reader of plain sense, how mean soever his capacity or attainments. The true reason which makes the Bible so little understood, is because it is so little attended to or considered, and not, as some would have us believe, because it is a sealed book, as if God had locked it from our understandings; whereas he has given it for a guide and a rule to all who will be guided and ruled by it: that there are some parts of it difficult and hard to be understood, I readily acknowledge; but to say that the general scope and meaning of it is so, is equally wicked and absurd, and the passages here set down make it appear that it is false. I shall go on to take a view of those Scriptures first, which teach us what we are to believe concerning our Saviour, and then proceed to search out those which teach us how we must obey him. Our Lord himself asserts his Divinity in the strongest terms, when he says to the Jews, Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was I am (John viii. 58.) alluding to the 14th verse of the third chapter of Exodus, where God says unto Moses, I am that I am; and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I am hath sent me unto you. He likewise tells in the first chapter of the Revelation, ver. 11th, that he is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. The first chapter of the Hebrews is likewise fully expressive of this truth: ‘ God, who at sundry times and in divers
‘ manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
‘ hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath
‘ appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;
‘ who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of
‘ his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power,
‘ when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right
‘ hand of the majesty on high, being made so much better than
‘ the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent
‘ name than they; for unto which of the angels said he at any
‘ time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? And
‘ again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?
‘ And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world
‘ he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him; and of the
‘ angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers
a flame

‘ a flame of fire : but unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God,
 ‘ is for ever and ever ; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of
 ‘ thy kingdom : thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity ;
 ‘ therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of
 ‘ gladness above thy fellows. And thou, Lord, in the beginning
 ‘ hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the
 ‘ work of thy hands ; they shall perish, but thou remainest ; and
 ‘ they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt
 ‘ thou fold them, and they shall be changed ; but thou art the
 ‘ same, and thy years shall not fail.’ From all which I conclude,
 that this article of our faith is settled upon as firm ground as the
 Scriptures can establish it, and set in as clear a point of view as
 words can place it.

I shall now consider some of those texts which more immediately
 teach us what the Son of God is to us, and what that faith is which
 will obtain acceptance from him :

‘ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must
 ‘ the son of man be lifted up ; that whosoever believeth in him
 ‘ should not perish, but have everlasting life : for God so loved the
 ‘ world, that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that
 ‘ whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal
 ‘ life : for God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the
 ‘ world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that
 ‘ believeth on him is not condemned ; but he that believeth not is
 ‘ condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of
 ‘ of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation,
 ‘ that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather
 ‘ than light, because their deeds were evil.’ John iii. 14, &c.
 This shews us it is the wickedness of our hearts, and not the
 weakness of our understandings, which is the great obstruction to
 true faith. We are also here taught, that all evil-doers are enemies
 to the true faith ; ‘ For every one that doth evil hateth the light,
 ‘ neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved :
 ‘ but he that doth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds
 ‘ may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.’ It nearly
 concerns all those to consider of this, who are constantly hearing
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from the pulpit what Christ has done for his people, but have never learned from the word of God what manner of persons his people must be, in all holy conversation and godliness; and therefore go on securely in their sin at the same time that they go eagerly after their preachers. Our Saviour disputing with the Jews, who sought to kill him, because he said God was his father, tells them, 'As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will: for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. For the hour is coming in which all they that are in the graves shall hear the voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.' John v. 21, &c. Hear this warning voice, ye that do evil, ye that wilfully disobey the commands of God: the Lord himself here assures you, that he will not save you from the resurrection of damnation; no not though you have made the strongest professions of believing in his name. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.' From all which it is plain, that no faith will avail to the saving of our souls, but that which produces a sincere obedience; and to such only who constantly strive to approve themselves his faithful servants and subjects, he speaks the following gracious words, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.' John x. 27, &c. Our only safety is of God in Christ: we cannot of ourselves undertake, much less persevere in any thing that is good, on account of that depravity of nature which we inherit from our first parents, and which we exceedingly increase by our own actual transgressions; but if we do look up to God for help, and earnestly strive for the grace we pray for, and diligently use the help he gives us, we can do all that he requires of his creatures, and nothing shall be able to deprive us of that
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eternal reward he has promised to the righteous, for he will send the holy spirit (the third person in the ever-blessed Trinity) to guide us through every difficulty, and to comfort us under every temptation. ‘ For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.’ * 1 John v. 7. I will mention two more texts which expressly declare our Saviour to be God; the first is in the twentieth chapter of the Acts, where St. Paul, speaking to the elders of the church, says, ‘ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood.’ The other is in the ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, where Christ is said to be ‘ God over all, blessed for ever.’

‘ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the son of God: let us hold fast our profession, for we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.’ Hebrews iv. 16. ‘ He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.’ Hebrews vii. 25. ‘ For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.’ Hebrews ix. 24. “ And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.’ Hebrews ix. 27, 28.

Since then we are, as the same apostle speaks, compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses to confirm and strengthen our faith, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for

* See the authority of this text fully vindicated in the first volume of Dr. Edwards’s Body of Divinity.

the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God. Heb. xii. 1, 2.

Let us consider what it is to lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and to run with patience the race that is set before us.

True religion and true morality are inseparable; it is the enemy that endeavours to divide them; for it is impossible to possess the one without the other. It is true it frequently happens, through the providence of God, that there is good done in the world by people who do not act from religious principles; but this is not Christian virtue, to which alone the rewards of the gospel are promised: one may perform many acts of apparent goodness from natural constitution, regard to the world, and the like motives; but then alone do they become *religious* Acts, when they are done either in consequence of virtuous habits, or are performed with an immediate and express reference to God and his commandments. There are also men who make great professions of religion, which they place in what they call faith, and in going often to church, or to other places of public worship, just as their fancy and inclination leads them, but at the same time are shamefully negligent of gospel obedience, and walk contrary in many instances to the laws of God and Christ; but then this is not religion but profession: 'They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him.' Titus i. 16. 'But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and in easy to be treated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality and without hypocrisy.' James iii. 17.

Colossians iii. 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth: for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of

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 of disobedience.—But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath,
 malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth;
 lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with
 his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in
 knowledge after the image of him that created him. Where
 there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor
 free; but Christ is all, and in all; put on therefore (as the elect
 of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humble-
 ness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one-another,
 and forgiving one-another; even as Christ forgave you, so also do
 ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the
 bond of perfectness, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts,
 to the which ye are also called in one body; and be ye thankful.
 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admo-
 nishing one-another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
 singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord; and whatsoever ye
 do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
 giving thanks to God and the Father, by him. Wives submit
 yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.
 Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.
 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well plea-
 sing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger,
 lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your
 masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service as men-
 pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and whatsoever
 ye do in word, or in deed, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not
 unto men: knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the
 reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ: but he
 that doth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he doeth, and
 there is no respect of persons. Masters, give unto your servants
 that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master
 in heaven. Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with all
 perseverance; withal praying also for us, that God would open
 unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mysteries of Christ.”

We have here an excellent system of duties laid before us,
 which we are bound to follow to the best of our power, if ever
 we hope to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ; for they
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are his laws, and if we wilfully disobey them, we shake off our allegiance to him, and become rebels, instead of faithful subjects. Let us see then in what manner our practice agrees with them. Do we set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth? Or are they so set on things on the earth, that the things above have no place in them? Do we live as if we thought gain was godliness, and make our known duty give way to our worldly interest? Do we dare to allow ourselves in any of those vices for which the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience? Instead of putting on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, are we cruel, proud, passionate, revengeful? Instead of putting on that charity which is the bond of perfectness, of which we are told in the thirteenth chapter of the first of Corinthians, 'That it suffereth long and is kind; envieth not, vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.' It is but too plain that we give ourselves up to rash anger upon slight offences, we envy our brethren the blessings of our common father; and yet at the very time that we strive to lessen or undervalue these blessings in others, we take a pride in the advantages which have fallen to our own share, and despise those who do not possess them in the same degree of excellence. Again let us ask, if instead of seeking not our own, we seek any thing else but our private interest, regardless of the wants, and dangers, and sufferings of others? Do we not both think and speak evil, when there is no occasion given? Do we not rejoice and triumph in the discovery of our neighbours faults? Do we not wrong his character by misrepresenting him, and then condemn him for the crimes thus unjustly laid to his charge? If we do these things, it is plain our dispositions and tempers are the very reverse of that charity which is here given as the mark and character of a Christian. Lastly, let me ask, Are we unthankful to God for all the various blessings his bounty showers down upon us, especially for his inestimable love in the redemption of the world by his son Jesus Christ? Are we unmindful of the duties we owe to each other in the several stations wherein Providence has placed us; and do we walk contrary to them? Do we neglect to pray for ourselves, and others; or do it only in a careless, formal manner?

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manner? In a word, instead of consulting it in the most indifferent actions of life, do we make the glory of God no part of our concern? If it be thus with us (and the heart when honestly asked will always honestly answer) what is left for us who profess to believe the gospel is true, but a fearful looking for of judgment? The command is clear and plain, as well as just and holy, no subtilty of wit or eloquence can evade or distinguish away the punishment. Nothing remains but turning to the Lord in the way which his word has prescribed, with weeping, fasting, and praying, and doing it now in an acceptable time, when he will suffer himself to be intreated.

Since the opinions and consequently the actions of the serious part of the common people are so much in the power of their preachers, it behoves them, of all men, to be careful of the words they speak to an ignorant and promiscuous audience: there are many propositions which by accurate distinctions and reasoning may be shewn to be agreeable to the word of God, which ought not to be laid down in a general way, and to the people at large, because, for want of those distinctions, they must necessarily draw erroneous conclusions from them. Thus, for instance, there are some very eminent preachers, who are constantly telling their followers with great earnestness, that they are not able to keep the law of God, nor to live up to his commandments: that this doctrine, however true, if we mean to speak of a perfect sinless obedience, is pernicious where the people are left to put their own constructions upon it, is very plainly seen in the lives of those who act under the influence of it. Nothing is more common than to see many mistaken deluded people, at the very same time that they go constantly and with the utmost earnestness to the public worship of God, allowing themselves in breaking his commandments by every gross offence; such as lying, flandering, envying, drunkenness, and many other instances of wilful disobedience. It is apparent therefore, as far as we suppose practice influenced by opinion, that the word of God is either misrepresented to them, or misunderstood by them: and surely it highly concerns their ministers to take this matter into their most serious consideration, lest they should be in any degree accessory to the loss of so many immortal souls.—Because Christ has
satisfied

satisfied for sin, are we not therefore to be told, it is for the sins only of those who to the best of their power forsake them? Because he has performed a perfect obedience in our stead, are we not therefore to be reminded that it will avail none but those who yield him the most perfect obedience they can pay? and because we have a sinful nature within, which is continually prompting us to evil, is it not therefore of the utmost necessity that we be warned to take heed to our ways? That we be instructed in the particulars of our duty; and that we be admonished of the certain punishment which will follow every voluntary sin, unless it be heartily repented of and forsaken? Where these things are not frequently and strongly urged, the gospel is not truly preached; and let not the people deceive themselves in thinking they are of the household of faith, and of the flock of Christ, while they go on in wilful sin. They have the Bible in their own hands, let them consult that, and they will find, that whatever are our disputes, nothing is so clear, as that wickedness is inconsistent with Christianity, that Christ has no part with Belial. Our Saviour himself says to us in the words which I have placed at the head of this discourse, Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say, &c.

I know the present state of the world is such, that it is very difficult for those who are placed in the lower stations of life to get a livelihood in it, without giving way to its sinful customs and practices; as for instance, the servant who will not be partaker of his master's sins, is in danger of losing his daily bread; the artificer who scruples an unjust or an unlawful gain must run the risque of being reduced to poverty; the tradesman who refuses to follow his calling on Sunday, in compliance with the humour of his superiors, is threatened with the loss of his business, and consequently of his bread: yet let these and every one who is tempted consider, it is much better to fall into the hands of God than into those of men; the world will fail us, whether we serve it or not; but God will be sure not to fail those who serve him, because he is faithful who hath promised. The apostle says, 'Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.' Philip. iv. 7. And he adds, 'The peace of God which passeth all understandings, shall keep your

‘ your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.’ What a blessing is here promised to an humble trust in God ! a blessing which the world can neither give nor take away, but which will remain with us so long as we hold fast the confidence from which it flows. While God sees fit to continue us in this world, he can always find means to provide for us ; and when he sees fit to take us out of it, he has made ample provision of eternal happiness in the world to come, for all such as faithfully serve and trust in him. But if you are still resolved to serve the world in preference of him who is your rightful Lord, know to your confusion that it will both enslave and deceive you ; for having no other confidence you will be forced to comply with all its unjust and unreasonable demands, and it will at last defraud you of the wages you expected from it ; or if you should gain some present advantages, which it is more than probable, you will lose, and be rather more involved in those difficulties from which you seek to free yourselves by sinful means, yet an offended God can easily ruin and destroy them all, so that you shall not be able to take the least comfort or satisfaction in them : and what a miserable condition will you be in when you come to die, to think that you have given away your soul, and have had nothing in exchange for it ! It is pronounced by our Lord to be the highest degree of folly to gain the whole world, if we lose our own souls in the pursuit of it ; if there can be a greater folly than this, it is to lose our eternal happiness, and gain nothing by the exchange but sorrow and vexation of spirit.

If then we pretend to be Christians, let us shew that we really are so, not only in word and profession, but in deed and in truth, by keeping the commands of God, and walking in all his laws which he has set before us. And above all, let us not vainly flatter ourselves that we shall attain that happiness which it has not entered the heart of man to conceive, by a mere ineffectual profession of belief in Christ. St. James tells us, that faith without works is dead. James ii. 20, &c. ‘ But wilt thou know, O vain man, that
 ‘ faith without works is dead ? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar ?
 ‘ Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was
 ‘ faith made perfect ? and the Scripture was fulfilled which saith,
 ‘ Abraham

‘ Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.’ Not that it is here meant that our works can of themselves procure our justification, for they are all so debased with the sinfulness of our nature, that the very best of them cannot be accepted upon their own account; but since Christ has died to purchase our reconciliation with God, that faith which produces these good works in us, will give us a sure interest in him; and so we shall be justified for his sake and through his merits.

If therefore we have hitherto walked contrary to this divine word, let us no longer harden our hearts against the calls of it; but let us return unto the Lord with all our hearts, for he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness. Let us repent us truly of our past sins, have a lively and stedfast faith in Christ our saviour, amend our lives, and be in perfect charity with all men; so shall we receive an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away: reserved in heaven for those who hear the word of God and keep it, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation—and let us draw near to God in all his holy ordinances, and obey them that have the rule over us, who watch for our souls, as they that must give account.

It may perhaps be thought a needless task to set down at large so many passages of holy Scripture, which is, or ought to be in every one's hands; but let it be considered, that bringing our faith and practice into one short comprehensive view, and setting it before his eyes in God's own words may, by the blessing of his grace, give some check to the profligate sinner or the formal Christian, who is more used to consider the comment than the text. Let it likewise be remembered, that it is the prevailing method of the present times to overlook and pass by the plain doctrines of Christianity, which are given to make us wise unto salvation, for the sake of those which are obscure and difficult. Hence it comes to be said that the Bible is an unintelligible book, except to a few whose eyes the Lord is pleased to open, but the sense of it intirely hid from all others. What is this but saying that God has mocked

his creatures, by making their salvation depend on the right knowledge of what it is not in their power to know! but this is an unjust and groundless aspersions on God and his word, whose saving truths are freely laid open to all who are willing to receive them. It must indeed be granted the doctrine of predestination is above our reach; and though the preachers of it pretend it is to them clear as the sun, and draw a deluded multitude after them, yet we find by experience, and are expressly told in the Scriptures, we are not able to comprehend it in our present state. We may however be assured this doctrine is grossly perverted and abused, when it is made to represent God as a cruel being, who has made the greatest part of mankind on purpose to be eternally miserable without a possibility of escaping it. This is indeed throwing the blame of both our guilt and punishment upon God; the bare suspicion of it must fill an honest mind with horror, and in proportion as the belief of it prevails, it will abate or totally extinguish the love of God in the soul: it also takes away the true foundation of faith, for no one can repose an intire and unreserved confidence in a being whom he at best supposes to be of a partial and limited goodness. He may, perhaps, be worked up into a persuasion that he himself is one of a few chosen favourites, but this has nothing in it of the excellence of true faith, which rests itself on God as a being of infinite goodness and perfection, and fears to offend him as a being of infinite justice and holiness; who will by no means clear the guilty, though he will pardon the truly repenting sinner, through the all-sufficient atonement of Jesus Christ. This ascribes to the divine nature all its attributes, and the person influenced by it will yield a sincere and universal, though his frailty will not admit of a perfect obedience. But he who is puffed up with a groundless presumption of the particular favour of God towards himself, will be ready to set aside his commands, whenever they stand in competition with his own wordly interest. True faith will also inspire universal charity, which will show itself by real acts of kindness where-ever its power extends; but the persuasion of mind which is founded on this doctrine of predestination shuts up the heart from the love of man as well as that of God, and inspires only selfishness and haughtiness; besides, it is directly contrary to that gracious declaration that the Lord is loving unto every man and his mercy is over
‘ all

all his works. And how constantly do we find throughout the Scriptures the favour and acceptance of God promised to those who serve him in an upright sincerity, and his threatenings denounced against all wilful sinners. See particularly the thirty-third chapter of Ezekiel. But what can be the meaning of those promises and threatenings, or of what use can they be to us, if we have no power to choose the good or refuse the evil, and that there is no such thing as free will in us? Surely whoever attempts to explain away the sense of them to make way for any particular doctrine or system of his own, may very justly have applied to him those words of the prophet Ezekiel,
 ‘ With lyes ye have made sad the heart of the righteous whom
 ‘ I have not made sad, and strengthened the hands of the wicked,
 ‘ that he should not return from his wickedness.’

I shall conclude with divers exhortations of St. Peter: ‘ Therefore
 ‘ laying aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies and envies,
 ‘ and all evil speaking, as new born babes desire the sincere milk
 ‘ of the word, that ye may grow thereby. Dearly beloved, I
 ‘ beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts
 ‘ which war against the soul: having your conversation honest
 ‘ among the gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-
 ‘ doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold,
 ‘ glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves unto
 ‘ every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be unto
 ‘ the king as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are
 ‘ sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of
 ‘ them that do well; for so is the will of God, that with well doing
 ‘ ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and
 ‘ not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the
 ‘ servants of God. Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear
 ‘ God, honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with
 ‘ all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward:
 ‘ for this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God
 ‘ endure grief suffering wrongfully: for what glory is it, if when ye
 ‘ be buffeted for your faults ye take it patiently, this is acceptable
 ‘ with God; for even hereunto were ye called: but if when ye do
 ‘ well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, because Christ also
 ‘ suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his
 F steps,

' steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : who
 ' when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he
 ' threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth
 ' righteously : who his own self bare our sins in his own body on
 ' the tree, that we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness ;
 ' by whose stripes ye were healed, for ye were as sheep going
 ' astray, but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your
 ' souls.—Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of
 ' another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous ; not rendering
 ' evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrarywise blessing,
 ' knowing that ye are thereunto called that ye should inherit a
 ' blessing ; for he that will love life and see good days, let him
 ' refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.
 ' Let him eschew evil, and do good ; let him seek peace, and
 ' ensue it : for the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and
 ' his ears are open unto their prayers ; but the face of the Lord is
 ' against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you,
 ' if ye be followers of that which is good ? And if ye suffer for
 ' righteousness sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their
 ' terror, neither be troubled, but sanctify the Lord God in your
 ' hearts ; and be ready always to give an answer to every one that
 ' asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and
 ' fear ; having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of
 ' you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse
 ' your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of
 ' God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing : for
 ' Christ also hath once suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that
 ' he might bring us to God.—The elders which are among you I
 ' exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of
 ' Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed :
 ' feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight
 ' thereof, not by constraint but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but
 ' of a ready mind : neither as being lords over God's heritage, but
 ' being ensamples to the flock ; and when the chief shepherd shall
 ' appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.
 ' Likewise ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder, yea all of
 ' you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility ; for
 ' God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

‘ Humble

‘ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that
 ‘ he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon him,
 ‘ for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant, because your adver-
 ‘ sary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he
 ‘ may devour ; whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that
 ‘ the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren, which
 ‘ are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us
 ‘ unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered
 ‘ awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

‘ To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.’

F I N I S.

...under the mighty hand of God, that
...in your time, calling all your care upon him,
...because your adversity
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To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

FIN

